

Patrons:
Robin Ince
Prof Steve Jones FRS
Dr Margaret McCartney
Sir Michael Rawlins
Lord Dick Taverne QC

HealthWatch

for science and integrity in medicine



Registered charity no 1003392

Minutes of the 26th Annual General Meeting, held at the Medical Society of London on 30th October 2014

- 1) **Present:** Nick Ross, David Bender, Mrs Walli Bounds, Dame Beulah Bewley, Dr Thomas Bewley, Prof Susan Bewley, Prof Debra Bick, Mrs Diana Brahams, Mr Malcolm Brahams, Prof Edzard Ernst, Ms Annabell Ferriman, Mr James Grogono, Mr Alan Henness, Dr Andrew Herxheimer, Mr Keith Isaacson, Mrs Anne Raikes, Sir Michael Rawlins, Mr Richard Rawlins, Ms Caroline Richmond, Mr Les Rose, Lord Dick Taverne, Lady Janice Taverne, Dr Geoff Watts, Dr Peter Wilmshurst.
- 2) **Apologies for absence were received from:** Mr Robin Ince, Mr Roger Fiskin, Dr Neville Goodman, Prof John Kirwan, Mr Tom Moberly.
- 3)
- 4) **Minutes of the 25th AGM** had been posted on the website; there were no matters arising.
- 5) **Chairman's report (Keith Isaacson)**

This has been a very active year with involvement in a number of issues.

Before Christmas our attention was drawn to the House of Commons Select committee's investigation into screening and the opportunity to submit our views. Extra committee meetings were convened and different aspects of screening were allocated to Committee members. In collating the contributions, I referred to Dr Margaret McCartney's book 'The Patient Paradox'. As Mandy had offered to edit the 3000 word document, I asked for all contributions to be finalised a week before the submission date. However on the day the submission was due in, a number of last minute improvements arrived by e-mail. I had a hectic morning running an outpatient clinic and at the same time making the alterations. The House of Commons computer was so inundated we had difficulty getting our document submitted, but with Mandy's help, it was accepted just before the cut off point of 12 Noon.

Two of our members were invited to give Oral evidence to the committee and I attended to hear Dr Margaret McCartney and Professor Mike Baum make our views clear. As far as I am concerned, I will certainly not present myself for screening - for anything!

The Government's new organisation called HEALTHWATCH ENGLAND causes confusion with our own Charity and there were suggestions that we should change our name. Various options for a new name were put forward. To discuss the matter fully I hosted an Away Day at my home. This was a very convivial event and the outcome was to call our organisation: **HeathWatch UK** with a new strapline '**For Science and Integrity in Medicine**'.

The Medical Innovation Bill introduced in the House of Lords by Lord Saatchi was thought by many to be a Quack's charter. However, not all agree, and our Patron Sir Mike Rawlins is one of those in favour of the Bill, so we are planning a Debate on 5th March when Sir Mike has agreed to debate the issue with Nick Ross.

We are very fortunate to have a Research Fund. Les Rose has done a lot of work on his project on Consumer Protection Legislation, he has obtained the necessary legal advice and is ready to launch it. Two of our committee members: Susan Bewley and Les Rose drew our attention to the Age Extension Trial of Mammography Screening. It is very badly designed, does not meet the requirements of a trial, and no matter what the outcome, the age extension **will** be introduced. We have taken this on board and we have been successful in getting a number of articles and letters published in the BMJ **Finally** this is my third and last report and I must thank all the members of our committee, student and trainee members for their contributions. We had some very lively meetings which on occasions required Chairman's action!

I thank David for his support as Secretary and Nick for his input. However there is one phenomenal person to whom we all owe a great deal - and I invite you to show your appreciation of - Mandy Payne, our editor.

6) Membership report (Kenneth Bodman)

Five new members have joined this year.

Anne and I spent time reconciling the membership list and bank statements to check that all standing orders we assumed were being paid had indeed been paid. We found 23 standing orders that had not been paid by June 1st this year. I wrote to all of these people.

To date I have received 14 replies. Three people said that they had resigned, some several years ago, cancelling their standing order, but not informing me, despite the fact that they had still been receiving the newsletter by email. One person replied saying that the member had died a couple of years ago, but obviously the email account had not been closed, since the email sending newsletter had not bounced. Five people sent in new standing orders; presumably they had changed their bank, but not all of their standing orders had been transferred. I am still waiting for 9 people to reply. I do not want to antagonise them, so will give them a few more days before I phone them.

This means that confirmed membership now stands at 128. Allowing for those 9 who have yet to reply, 48 receive the newsletter by email (at a cost of £25) and 80 by post (at a cost of £30).

Applications for student membership have been steady, and we now have 49 student members, 11 of whom have accepted an invitation to continue for a further 2 years during their FY posts. None of those who had completed their FY posts as student members responded to an invitation to take up paid membership.

7) Treasurer's report (Anne Raikes)

The Balance Sheet and Statement of Financial Activities for the period 1st June 2013 to 31st May 2014 are available at the AGM and/or a complete copy of the Financial Statements if required.

As in previous years, the major part of our total expenditure of £5,654 (£6,254) is incurred in producing and distributing the Newsletter (four each year). Last year's higher expenditure includes the impact of highly successful lecture evening in March 2013.

Members of the Committee continue to give their time and effort at no cost to HealthWatch. The level of subscription income of £3,618 was down slightly from the previous year (£3,875) but together with Gift Aid still covers the cost and distribution of the Newsletter. There are some subscriptions outstanding which are being followed up on.

During the year £1,735 (£1,986) was expended on the HealthWatch Student Prize. This was funded from the donation from Professor John Garrow. There is now £3,653 on in this fund for the coming years which includes £2,500 given by Katy Christomanou (Senior Journals Editor, STEM) of Cambridge University Press who generously agreed to sponsor the competition from 2014 on behalf of CUP.

The Accounts show a small profit this year of £476 (excluding the restricted Healthwatch Student Prize fund) compared with last year's loss of £308. The difference is predominately that last year includes the cost of the lecture evening. There remains a need to maintain Healthwatch's level of reserves, not only for the Newsletter but also in case of libel defence (insurance being impractical) and for future projects that the Committee would like to implement.

HealthWatch Research Fund amounted to £50,242 at 31 May 2014 which is made up of original donation of £50,000 plus some bank interest.

Healthwatch reserves, excluding the Student Prize Fund and the Healthwatch Research Fund, totalled £16,977 at end May 2014, up about £500 from last year, the bulk of which is held in a COIF Charities Deposit Fund.

8) Election of officers and committee members. There being no other nominations, the following were elected unopposed:

Chairman: James May

Vice-Chairman: Debra Bick

Treasurer: Anne Raikes

Secretary: David Bender

Committee members who are Trustees:

Susan Bewley, Diana Brahams, Malcolm Brahams, Keith Isaacson, John Illman, Les Rose, Caroline Richmond.

9) Consumer Protection Regulations trial (Les Rose)

Les Rose gave a brief presentation of the need for an investigation of the extent to which the Consumer Protection Regulations are being applied to healthcare claims, and the complex legal background. He then described the investigation, which will involve 20 investigators making and following up complaints about 20 products / claims (5 per investigator) through Trading Standards Officers.

10) HealthWatch student prize competition for critical analysis of research protocols (Walli Bounds)

The HealthWatch Student Prize Competition started in 2002, largely on the initiative of Professor John Garrow, a previous Chairman of HealthWatch, in order to gain insight into the quality of training, specifically concerning evidence-based treatments, received by UK healthcare professionals.

Healthcare providers and the lay public continue to be inundated with publicity about new and/or allegedly more effective, or 'gentler' treatments. However, in order to decide whether diagnostic or therapeutic claims for a particular treatment are valid, medical, nursing/midwifery students, and those of allied professions, need to be able to assess the quality of the evidence presented, in order to guide their clinical decisions. This competition aims to find-out how well our students are equipped for this task. Funding from the AJAHMA Trust, The Medico Legal Society, and from Professor Garrow has enabled us to run the competition every year for the past 12 years. We are most grateful to Cambridge University Press for having supplied the funds to enable us to continue this important work, and I have pleasure in herewith presenting the results of this, the thirteenth competition.

Aim:

The project aims to determine whether medical/nursing students have acquired the skills needed to critically appraise clinical trial protocols and hence assess the validity of research findings. Often claims for the effectiveness or safety of healthcare treatments published in the medical/lay press and on the internet are, on closer examination, based on poorly designed studies that could not possibly support the stated claims. It is therefore vitally important that our future healthcare professionals develop the skills needed to properly assess the quality of clinical trials, and have the confidence to speak out against 'bad science'.

Method:

Students are invited to appraise four 1-page long hypothetical research protocols and to rank them on a scale of 1 – 4 (1 = best, 4 = worst) according to which one is most likely to provide a reliable answer to the stated aim of the trial. The protocols are designed to contain varying degrees of scientific, methodological and ethical flaws, which the students are expected to identify and comment upon. They are required (in no more than 600 words) to explain their reasons for assigning their ratings and suggest ways in which the protocols could be improved. Their replies are then assessed against the pre-assigned ranking from the judges.

Protocols in the 2014 competition comprised:

Acupuncture for back pain
 Zinc for ear infection in children
 Breathing exercises for asthma
 Tamsulosin for ureteric stones

Administration:

The competition is open to all medical, dental, nursing and midwifery students, and students of professions allied to medicine in the UK and is administered by Professor David Bender. He notifies all training colleges early in the year, collects the entries, sends the anonymized entries (from those who assigned the protocols in the correct order) to the judges for detailed appraisal, and notifies all participants of the results. Students are grouped into one of the following two categories, with each category offering £500 for the winner and £100 for each of up to five runners-up:-

Medicine and Dentistry
 Nursing, Midwifery and Professions Allied to Medicine (PAM)

Results:

All entries were judged 'blind' by the three judges. To qualify for a prize, students had to achieve a minimum of 70% of the maximum possible score, based on students correctly commenting on the presence or absence of key protocol design features.

A total of 48 entries were received (46 fewer than last year), of which 28 (58%) ranked the protocols in the correct order. Of 43 entries from medical/dental students, 23 (53%) ranked the protocols correctly, whilst all 5 entries from the nursing category did so. This year's low response rate is particularly disappointing, bearing in mind the concerted efforts made in publicising the competition. Moreover, our finding that only just over half of the medical/dental students were able to rank the protocols in the right order, suggests the need for better awareness among, and training of, healthcare professionals in the field of evidence-based medicine, especially as they are often the first port of call when patients/members of the public seek professional guidance about medical claims made in the media. As in earlier years, many failed to spot the lack of ethics committee approval or informed patient consent in specific protocols, while others concentrated on less important aspects, whilst failing to note critical omissions, such as lack of a control group or assessor blinding, factors that are more likely to influence the outcome of a trial. Our findings clearly show that more intensive training in what constitutes a 'good quality' research protocol is needed, to enable our future doctors and nurses to critically appraise research findings and claims for efficacy or superiority of new products/procedures.

Despite the above reservations, we are pleased that a minority of entrants excelled in their appraisals, and we are happy to extend our admiration and congratulations to them. Their prizes will be awarded by HealthWatch President Nick Ross at the HealthWatch AGM on 30th October 2014. They are:

Medical/Dental Students

Winner:	Yuhan Ong	Aberdeen
Runners-up:	Jenifa Jeyakumar	Kings College London
	Keith Sacco	Malta
	David Isaacs (unable to attend)	Brighton & Sussex
	On Fai Arthur Woo	Glasgow
	Alicia Barnes	Keele

Nursing/Midwifery/PAM

Winner:	Lynette Fox	Nottingham
Runners-up:	Adam Peel (unable to attend)	East Anglia
	Ina Petrova Mastalurova (unable to attend)	Aberdeen

Funding/Acknowledgements:

We thank Cambridge University Press for having sponsored the 2014 competition and David Bender, Sally Gordon Boyd, Walli Bounds, Roger Fiskén and Derek Ho for their administrative and scientific contributions.

11) Presentation of the 2014 HealthWatch Award to Simon Singh *for fighting for truth in science.*